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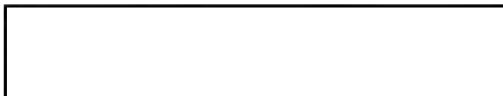
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The Policy Views of Nikolay Podgorny

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The Policy Views of Nikolay Podgorny

*Central Intelligence Agency
Directorate of Intelligence*

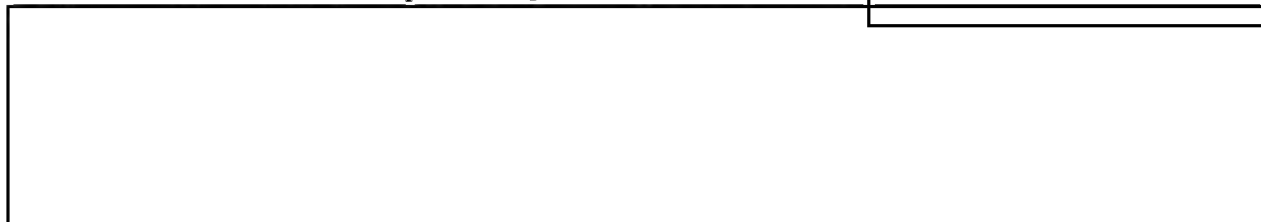
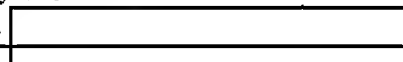
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OVERVIEW

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The abrupt, unceremonious removal of Nikolay Podgorny from the Politburo indicates a serious political split within the leadership.

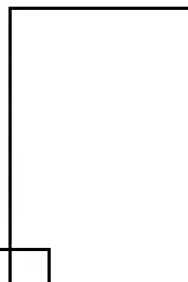


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While concern for his institutional position apparently precipitated Podgorny's actions, his ouster may eventually affect the political consensus within the Soviet leadership on a number of other questions. Most of Podgorny's policy views seem to parallel those of Politburo member and Central Committee secretary Mikhail Suslov, although the latter has, on occasion, exhibited more flexibility than Podgorny. Podgorny is politically both doctrinaire and conservative. He is less pragmatic, flexible, or innovative than either Brezhnev or Kosygin. He has, in particular, been less enthusiastic than Brezhnev about the developing relationship with the US and more skeptical about its benefits to the USSR.

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His removal, therefore, does subtract from the policy equation a distinctive viewpoint on a number of political issues.

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The Policy Views of Nikolay Podgorny

Podgorny's Foreign Policy Views

As a consequence of his position, Podgorny had an active role in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy. He traveled to various countries in the Middle East and other parts of the underdeveloped world. Most recently, he made a highly publicized trip to Africa, an area of increasing importance to Soviet foreign policy. In addition, he frequently met with visiting foreign leaders in Moscow. While he certainly did not rival Brezhnev as a foreign policy spokesman, both his institutional role and his membership on the USSR Defense Council provided him with opportunities to articulate his views on significant foreign policy questions.

Soviet-US Relations

Podgorny over the last decade was consistently more suspicious of the West than some of his senior colleagues. On several occasions he publicly complained at length about past Western treatment of the USSR, noting Western rejection of the Soviet Union's peace initiatives and Western efforts to cordon, contain, and suppress the Soviet Union. Even as late as 1974, Podgorny coupled "imperialist" efforts to defeat socialism during World War II with attempts by the West to contain the Soviet Union during the cold war.

Podgorny's questioning of Western motives carried over to his attitude toward the US.

Podgorny did generally support detente. At various times he used such phrases as "making detente irreversible," "detente has established deep roots," "supplement political detente with military detente," "strengthening of peace and cooperation is the only wise policy," to indicate his support. Podgorny has nevertheless been among the Politburo's least enthusiastic proponents of detente. He often lagged behind his colleagues in advancing his support, and was notably less optimistic that further obstacles could be overcome. He went out of his way to stress that cooperation with capitalist countries would not be established all at once or on all questions. He also warned, long before other Politburo members began to do so this year, that some in the West sought to use detente to gain unilateral military advantages. Furthermore, he criticized some of his colleagues, in veiled terms, for incorrectly assessing the nature and strength of the opposition to detente. Thus in December 1974, less than one month after Vladivostok, he declared that "it would be intolerably nearsighted to fail to take full account of the activity of certain circles to undermine the understandings reached and to wish to force along the arms race and return to the tactics of supercharging tension."

In light of Podgorny's skeptical view of detente and US motives, his emphasis on continued efforts to "strengthen the defensive

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might of the motherland" and to "increase the combat ability of our armed forces" is not surprising. While Brezhnev and Kosygin have expressed concern about a military buildup in the West, neither has recently linked this to an increase in Soviet strength; Brezhnev and at times Defense Minister Ustinov have even asserted that the Soviet armed forces have all that is necessary, a view more moderate than Podgorny's position.

Podgorny's dismissal, therefore, eliminates one of the leadership's more prominent skeptics regarding the appropriate limits of detente. It is not clear, however, whether his removal will give Brezhnev additional room for maneuver on the Soviet relationship with the United States.

Sino-Soviet Relations

While differences within the Soviet leadership over the Chinese question are difficult to discern, Podgorny's views are certainly hardline. Shortly after the border incidents in March 1969, he warned the Chinese that any attempt to violate the territorial integrity of the USSR or Mongolia would be given a "shattering rebuff." A year later he became the first civilian leader to echo Grechko's call for a defense buildup in the east as well as the west. He attacked Mao by name, accused the Chinese leadership of imposing a barracks-style dictatorship on the Chinese people, asserted that the Maoists are working in concert with imperialist circles, and expressed public concern over China's nuclear missile potential. Even so, in the context of Soviet leadership opinion about China over the last 15 years, Podgorny's perspective was not extreme. It is doubtful that his departure will have any impact on Soviet thinking on policy toward the Chinese.

Soviet Policy in the Middle East

Podgorny was in the forefront in articulating Soviet policy on the Middle East. His views for the most part closely paralleled those of other Soviet leaders. In particular he supported the military buildup of the Egyptian and Syrian armed forces. He also apparently favored the

Soviet Union's deepening political involvement and military presence in Egypt. It was Podgorny who succeeded in convincing Sadat to sign the USSR-Egypt Treaty of Friendship.

Nevertheless, certain of Podgorny's actions and statements suggest that his views on Soviet policy toward the area did not coincide exactly with those of his senior colleagues. Sadat has credibly alleged, for example, that in 1971 Podgorny promised the Egyptians certain types of military equipment that the Soviet leadership subsequently was unwilling to supply.

his removal may have eased the way for adoption of a more flexible position when and if Brezhnev deems it appropriate.

Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe

The invasion of Czechoslovakia was an acid test of the attitudes of Soviet leaders toward Eastern Europe. By all accounts, the Soviet leaders were divided; some favored the use of force to suppress the Czechoslovak experiments while others, for a variety of reasons, opposed it. Podgorny,

supported Soviet suppression of Czechoslovakia. His harsh public remarks only one month before the invasion contrasted sharply with the restrained treatment accorded this subject by Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Suslov. Podgorny charged that "rightwing, antisocialist forces" were using the reform measures "to

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discredit the Czechoslovak Communist Party, to deprive it of its leading role...." He noted that representatives of Warsaw Pact countries had declared "that they would never agree to the historic gains of socialism being possibly endangered or to imperialism's making a breach in the socialist system—be it by peaceful or nonpeaceful means, be it from within or without." Finally, adding a message of support to pro-Soviet elements within the Czechoslovak leadership, he noted, "Our Czechoslovak friends do not have to doubt that the Communist and all Soviet people will, by implementing their international duty, render them every assistance and support...."

ture has significantly affected the leadership consensus on these questions in the short run. Whether his removal will have any long-range impact is questionable.

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Podgorny's Views on Domestic Policy

Much of the leadership debate on domestic issues during the Brezhnev era is still extremely murky. With the exception of the Shelest affair in 1972, serious leadership disagreement over internal policy has rarely become public. But the following five issues appear to be the major political questions on which the leadership has experienced some division: economic reorganization, center-periphery relations, economic priorities, socialist legality and social control, and the drafting of a new constitution.

Economic Reorganization

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The Brezhnev regime has made several attempts to deal with the problems of a declining rate of economic growth, poor quality control, ineffective economic planning, and unacceptable levels of labor productivity. Podgorny appears to have supported the status quo during the leadership debates about the best organizational and managerial solutions to these problems. When some thought was apparently being given to far-reaching reorganization of the branch system, he defended the existing sectorial principle of industrial organization. He also was less enthusiastic than Brezhnev, Romanov, and others about the creation of production associations.

In general, however, Podgorny adopted a doctrinaire attitude toward reformist developments in both Eastern and Western Europe.

In an article in *Kommunist* in November 1976, he observed that the various prescriptions for "improving socialism" would create a system in which "the working class and the Communist Party would play no leading role, where there would be no democratic centralism or proletarian internationalism...." Such a system, according to Podgorny, is one in which "socialism, deprived of its basic principles, stops being socialism."

Podgorny, of course, was not the only Soviet leader with an ideologically conservative viewpoint of developments in Eastern Europe and relations with West European Communist parties. In fact, Moscow currently appears to be adopting a more conservative stance in both areas. It is doubtful, therefore, that his depart-

Podgorny's views on these questions have puzzled analysts. Kosygin would seem to have been a more likely proponent of such views since these reorganizations would directly affect his institutional position. Conceivably, Podgorny resisted adopting these organizational changes because he believed they might expand the power of the party apparatus to intervene in economic management and lead to an unacceptable increase in Brezhnev's influence in one of the few policy areas he has not dominated in recent years.

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Economic Priorities

During the 1960s, Podgorny had advocated the allocation of more resources for consumer goods. This is one of the few aspects of economic policy where he assumed a forward, activist position. At times he even linked industrial and agricultural development to realization of this objective.

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During the last eight years, however, he began to qualify his pro-consumer attitude. In 1971, for example, Podgorny asserted that "it is not a simple matter to guarantee high rates and proportional development of all sections of the national economy." He went on to say that industrial production, particularly heavy industry, must be given a leading role in economic expansion. During this same period, Kosygin was arguing for different priorities. The main task of the new plan, Kosygin asserted, was "ensuring...adherence to all basic proportions in the development of branches of the national economy...(and) ensuring that the balance of all its parts is maintained...." He added, in obvious criticism of the position that consumer goods production must be sacrificed, that "we have the capability of producing an additional great quantity of assorted goods for the population."

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In contrast to Brezhnev and Kosygin, Podgorny placed the responsibility for raising the standard of living squarely on the backs of the Soviet worker. The three men agreed that further increases in consumer production depend on expansion of national income, and even that increases in labor productivity are required to accomplish this objective. But they disagreed sharply about the method for doing so.

Brezhnev and Kosygin find the solution primarily in organizational and managerial reform, improved utilization of productive resources, adoption of a new management system, establishment of production associations, and acceleration of scientific and technological progress. Podgorny, on the other hand, found the remedy in greater labor discipline. He noted that "all substantial losses, defects in production, and failure to fulfill plans are connected

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with violation of labor discipline." There is only one way to increase national wealth and the well-being of the Soviet people he argued: "It is work, conscientious, selfless, and highly productive work."

Center-Periphery Relations

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Podgorny's attitude toward nationality policy has been very complex. On the one hand, he is a Ukrainian with well-established ties to the republic

On the other hand, he at times obsequiously praised the contributions of the "Great Russian people" to Soviet development. On one occasion he said that other Soviet peoples "justly give them (the Russians) first place among the builders of Communism." He added that it was no accident that "abroad all citizens of our multinational country are frequently described as Russians."

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His ambivalence was also reflected in remarks more directly concerned with policy. For the most part, Podgorny adopted the mild formulation "comprehensive, flourishing, and gradual rapprochement" to describe the prevailing state of relations between nationalities, while Brezhnev has been less inclined to qualify the process of "drawing together" and has been more critical of attempts to "artificially consolidate national distinctiveness." Brezhnev has also argued that the national problem has been settled "completely, finally, and for good," a formulation never endorsed by Podgorny.

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Although Podgorny has used moderate "buzz words" to signal some restraint on nationality policy, he did, unlike former Ukrainian First Secretary Shelest, support an economic development program based on national needs rather than republican interests. He was one of the first national leaders to assert that the economic inequality of the former feudal outposts of the Tsarist empire had been eliminated. Spelling out the corollary that excessive emphasis on local economic needs could therefore no longer be justified, he argued that economic development questions must be resolved from the viewpoint

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of the USSR national economy, not the particular concerns of individual republics. "Experience has shown," he said, "that economic progress for the USSR as a whole creates favorable conditions for the all-round development of each republic's economy...." In supporting this principle, however, Podgorny did not go as far as certain of his colleagues. For example, unlike Brezhnev and Shcherbitsky, he avoided giving special emphasis to Siberian development, the great rival claimant to regional investment resources desired by the various republics.

Congress, he was the only major leader who stressed the linkage between these principles.

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Later, Podgorny continued to devote more attention to the importance of socialist legality than did other prominent leaders. In his 1974 election speech he described how Lenin had been urged "to sidestep the legally established order, supposedly in the interests of the cause." After noting Lenin's categorical rejection of this view, Podgorny emphasized to his audience that "violations of the law and attempts to get around them cannot be justified by any reference to objective reasons, no matter how valid they may appear at first glance." Brezhnev's treatment of this theme during his election speech in the same year was more cursory and restrained.

Socialist Legality and Social Control

Podgorny struck a careful balance in his views on this subject. Like other Soviet leaders, he articulated a highly moralistic attitude toward violations of the law and abrogations of civic responsibility. He worried about the numerous manifestations of antisocial behavior, such as alcoholism, and about a decline in the ideological tempering and willingness to sacrifice of the Soviet people. He, along with Suslov, Masharov, and occasionally Brezhnev, attacked the conversion of material goods into a "self-seeking objective" among some elements of the Soviet people and called for "the creation of an atmosphere of social intolerance toward consumerism, grabbing, and money-grubbing."

Podgorny, for the most part, avoided commenting on the most sensitive law-and-order question currently facing the Soviet leadership: the dissidents. Undoubtedly, he had no sympathy for them or their views, and he probably opposed any relaxation of the regime's attitude toward them.

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He did not, however, participate in the growing public clamor against them. In his speech to the 23rd Congress in 1966, not long after the Sinyavsky-Daniel affair, he, in sharp contrast to Brezhnev, did not mention the issue. While he in the last several years roundly denounced efforts by foreign countries to tell the Soviet Union "how to live," he did not take an active role in castigating the potential recipients of such help.

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The New Soviet Constitution

Brezhnev has been far in front of his colleagues in promoting the need for a new USSR Constitution. The Central Committee's approval of the draft, in principle, and its publication for discussion are a personal triumph for him. It is less clear how important the specifics of the new Constitution were in Podgorny's demise.

Podgorny was one of the few Soviet leaders to mention the new Constitution prior to its

acceptance by the Central Committee. In his *Kommunist* article in 1976 he noted that it would mark "the crowning of all efforts to develop legislation." His brief rationale for the new Constitution was similar to Brezhnev's statements on this subject.

gorny, other aspects of the draft appear to concur with his positions. In institutional terms, the new constitution represents a significant increase in the status of the Soviets in general and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in particular. Podgorny had pushed for this since 1966. The draft also has a strong ideological overtone, a feature that Podgorny as well as Suslov would have favored. In essence, the draft appears to be a balanced document that reflects a variety of viewpoints. Podgorny's interests, had he remained in the leadership, would have benefited at least as much as they would have been harmed.

Although Podgorny's motives are unclear, he apparently was opposed to any significant change in the basic organization of the economy. It is not at all certain, however, how strong his opposition to restrictions in republican authority was. His ties with the Ukrainian party apparatus now led by Brezhnev protege, Shcherbitsky, had probably weakened over the years. His defense of central ministries, his lukewarm acceptance of production associations, and his support for the primacy of national economic needs over republican interests have suggested a definite centralist bias.

Even if we assume that these two constitutional developments were opposed by Pod-

If, however, Brezhnev intended to ease Podgorny out of the leadership over the next five months in order to obtain the presidency—a view supported by the constitutional provision creating a First Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet—it is quite conceivable that Podgorny would have strongly resisted by attacking various aspects of the reform. Such an attack could well have isolated him in a leadership that was not willing to challenge Brezhnev on this question. In this case, Podgorny's actions would have speeded up the timetable and increased the political drama, but would not have altered the eventual outcome.

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